

# Plymouth and World War II

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When the United States joined the Allies in World War II, massive resources were needed. Rationing, cloth collections, conservation efforts, victory gardens, donations of various metals and air raid watches were just the beginning of preparations, Plymouth residents, as always, did their share.

December 7, 1941 was the day that changed the United States forever. As the soldiers and sailors stationed at Pearl Harbor Hawaii saluted the flag at the start of the day, planes flew overhead. No one suspected, at first, that those planes were not ours. The Empire of Japan had declared war on the United States and in a few days, Germany joined in by declaring war against the United States as well.

Within hours as the news of the attack spread, military enlistments outnumbered expected estimates. Everywhere, including Plymouth, preparations began. Vast amounts of materials would be needed to build tanks, airplanes, trucks, ships and ordnances as well as uniforms, parachutes, helmets, boots and a multitude of other types of equipment. The home front needed to apply conservation measures in order to provide the materials needed for the war effort.

Scrap drives were quickly initiated in our neighborhoods and throughout the United States for collections of paper, all types of metals, cloth, tin, rubber and aluminum. Stores closed on Mondays to conserve fuel. Buying only what was necessary was heartily emphasized to discourage hoarding in times of crisis. Farms cannot increase available land and with no time to clear additional acreage for farming--conservation of produce was encouraged, after all the United States now had an army to feed! Victory gardens were planted at home to supplement available produce. It was a matter of national pride! Book drives were held to collect books to ship to servicemen.

Early in 1942 the federal government organized a system of rationing for specific items such as sugar, cheese, coffee, meat, fish, butter, shoes, rubber and gasoline. Each family member, including children were given a ration books which were usually distributed at school. The book contained stamps for specific commodities in allotted amounts. Merchants collected the appropriate stamps for designated items. Some items were distributed by the number of people in the household, this included items such as sugar, coffee, butter and cheese. Other items such as gasoline were distributed on the basis of one's need. For example, if one drove to work but really was within walking distance then this person got a minimal amount of gasoline. Military workers received stamps for a greater allotment of gasoline. Police, fire, clergy and civil defense workers were entitled to the largest ration of gasoline. The home front needed to be protected therefore those involved in local defense were priority.



All forms of car racing, including the infamous Indianapolis 500 were not only cancelled, but banned because gasoline was needed for the war effort. Scarce medicines such as penicillin were rationed. The usage of many medicines were determined by triage units at each hospital. Cautious use of medicines at home enabled their use for our military.

Ration stamps had either a letter, a symbol or a picture of an airplane, ship, tank, or fruit on them. The item the stamp could be used for changed every week with coding announced in the local newspaper. Commodity amounts could change due to availability and needs of our troops.

Blackout wardens patrolled the streets making sure there was no light at night to draw potential enemy aircraft. Air raid shelters were chosen for the protection of the public. Fall Mountain had aircraft spotters that travelled on horseback. Other airplane spotters were stationed at the tower on Chippens Hill. Their job was to watch for enemy planes. The effort to provide safety, materials for the military and conserve at home was enthusiastically maintained in Plymouth for the good of the country. Plymouth, as always, was ready and willing to do their share.

#### Samples of ration stamps

